ARTICLE APPEARED ON PAGE 30

WALL STREET JOURNAL
7 November 1985

Giving Defectors the Back of Our Hand

By Vladislav Krasnov

Vitaly Yurchenko, the KGB official who "redefected" to the Soviet Union, has overshadowed the cases of both Miroslav Medvid, the Soviet sailor who made two determined but unsuccessful attempts to swim to U.S. shores, and the anonymous Soviet soldier who made a dash for freedom through the gates of the U.S. Embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan. Yet all three incidents appear to be linked by more than just proximity in time. All three seem to fit a pattern of incompetence and ineptitude in the U.S.'s handling of Soviet defectors.

One would have expected that U.S. policy on defectors would have improved considerably since a man who has called the Soviet Union "an evil empire" moved into the White House. However, the record of the past few years tells a different story:

• On July 4, 1985, Galina Chursina, a 26-year-old Bolshoi Ballet dancer, ran into the U.S. Consulate in Istanbul, Turkey, and made it clear that she wanted sanctuary. An officer on duty told her: "Go back to your hotel, wait three days, and we'll call you." Apparently he did not need her company to celebrate the Fourth of July. Only when the young woman, who knew no Turkish, began to cry did the officer relent and arrange to keep her from the grasp of the alerted Soviets.

• On June 5, 1984, Sergei Kozlov, a Soviet mathematician on an exchange program in the U.S., who had made a move to defect on April 30, was allowed to board an airliner to Moscow. Apparently, U.S. officials were too willing to believe Soviet allegations that Mr. Kozlov was a "sick" man.

• In August 1983, Andrei Berezkov, the 16-year-old son of a Soviet diplomat, who had written to the New York Times and to President Reagan about his intention to defect, was allowed to return to Moscow without the mystery of his letter-writing ever being resolved. He was apparently considered less capable of defection than the 12-year-old Walter Polovchak, who had defected in 1979.

• On Sept. 25, 1981, Irina Mamedova, wife of a Soviet Embassy official, walked with her child into a Washington FBI office and asked for asylum. However, during an interview with Soviet and U.S. officials, arranged to ascertain her wishes, she changed her mind and was allowed to walk out with the Soviets. The U.S. officials weren't authorized to suggest to her that she might remain in their custody a few more days to weigh the consequences of her change of mind.

And finally, let us return to the recent case of Miroslav Medvid, the sailor who clearly demonstrated his determination to defect by swimming, twice, away from his ship. Not only were U.S. Border Patrol officials guilty of negligence but the State Department compounded their error by failing to reprimand them. The sailor did later sign a statement that he wished to return to the Soviet Union. But the statement was most probably obtained under the influence of mind-altering drugs that the Soviets had plenty of time to administer (there were reports that the sailor appeared sedated). Moreover, the testimony of a Ukrainian interpreter and the belated admission of an American doctor that Mr. Medvid's wrists had been cut contradict the State Department's original version of events. These facts were ignored by the State Department in an apparent effort to have the case closed lest it complicate the upcoming summit.

By handing over Mr. Medvid to the Soviets the negligent officials ruined his life. They also inflicted serious harm to U.S. national-security interests. For one thing, their handling of Mr. Medvid's case is bound to have a chilling effect on all would-be defectors, including those with sensitive information. When the word gets out, it will also dampen the spirit of all those in the Soviet Union who look upon the U.S. as the only country that can or will stand up to their oppressors. What is more, by caving in to the Soviet demands, they send exactly the wrong message to the Kremlin prior to the Geneva summit.

Does the U.S. government have an obligation to offer refuge to Soviet defectors? And do we need the defectors? The answer to the first question is obvious: As the leader of the free world the U.S. does have an obligation to offer refuge and protection to people fleeing from persecution, and, especially, to those who flee from our main adversary, the Soviet Union. After all, the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, which the U.S. supports, stipulates that: "Everyone has the right to leave any country . . . and seek and enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution." Therefore, we ought to accept all those who are bound to be persecuted for the mere attempt to defect.

Besides our moral and international obligations we ought to accept defectors because we need them for several reasons:

First, they are an important source of intelligence and military information about the Soviet Union. The Kremlin's espionage network is vastly larger than that of the U.S. and takes full advantage of our open society. Information obtained from KGB-related Soviet defectors is essential if we are to even partially offset the enormous Soviet advantage.

Second, defectors are sources of political and geopolitical information that allows us to understand and anticipate Soviet behavior at home and abroad.

Third, every defection is a blow to the prestige of the Soviet Union and a boost to our own morale, a tribute to our way of life and the values for which we stand.

Fourth, after entering the mainstream of American life, many defectors have contributed to this country as artists, scholars, educators and intelligence analysts.

Last, but not least, defectors contribute to our understanding of the lies and enticements of communist propaganda.

Since, as a nation, the U.S. has the obligation to offer refuge and protection to defectors and since it derives considerable benefit from them, the matter of defection should be a top priority in our foreign policy. However, the actual situation is very different. Our policy on defectors has ranged from handing over thousands of them to the Soviets for possible execution (as we did between 1945 and 1947), to attempts to induce defections in the early 1950s. More recently, U.S. policy has ranged from indifference and benign neglect to a pretended friendliness that covers up annoyance and contempt. Of course, I am referring to the bureaucrats who have dealt with defectors. I do not suggest that defectors have nothing to be grateful for. Dozens are certainly thankful for the hospitality and protection accorded them by the government and people of the U.S. Yet there are probably dozens of others whose encounters with U.S. officials brought no benefit either to the defectors or to the U.S. In yesterday's Washington Post, Donald Jameson, a retired CIA official who debriefed several Soviet defectors until his retirement in 1973, said that he has since been told of "definite cases of thoroughly inadequate handling" of some defectors.

STAT

Previous attempts have been made to revamp U.S. policy toward defectors. In 1970, Simas Kudirka, a Lithuanian sailor, jumped from a Soviet vessel to the U.S. Coast Guard cutter Vigilant during fishing-rights negotiations off Martha's Vineyard. Mr. Kudirka asked for political asylum. In violation of U.S. laws, the commander of the Vigilant allowed Soviet personnel to board the cutter, seize the hapless defector, subdue him by savage beating and take him back to the Soviet vessel. The incident produced a public outcry, and President Richard Nixon ordered the State Department to rewrite its guidelines for the handling of defectors.

Continued

However, the following year, in October 1971, an incident occurred with many similarities to the Yurchenko case. Anatoly Chebotarev, a Soviet military intelligence major, defected in Belgium. After arriving in the U.S. he exposed a Soviet spy network at NATO headquarters. On Dec. 21, Mr. Chebotarev unequivocally stated, in the presence of a Soviet official, that he had "no desire to return to the Soviet Union." However, two days later he disappeared from a safe house. The next day he turned up at the Soviet Embassy, and on Dec. 26, after a brief interview with a U.S. official, he was flown to Moscow. The full story of what happened has never been disclosed.

What New Policy Should Include

The U.S. has yet to formulate a policy on Soviet defectors that would both assure their human rights and satisfy U.S. national-security interests. Such a policy must include provisions that make certain that would-be defectors can state their wishes in a truly noncoercive environment, without the intimidating presence of Soviet officials. This is not the case under current guidelines. New guidelines should also include provisions for free legal counsel to any would-be defector.

Those defectors who do choose to stay in the U.S. should be, if they desire it, allowed early contact with local emigre communities and have access to the services of the Jamestown Foundation, a private, nonprofit organization in Washington, D.C., dedicated to helping defectors adjust to life in the West. But a new policy can hardly be formulated unless all three recent defection cases are impartially investigated by a congressional committee and the full truth of what happened is revealed.

Mr. Krasnov, a former editor of Radio Moscow's Foreign Broadcasting Division who defected to Sweden in 1962, is a professor at the Monterey Institute of International Studies in California. He is author of the forthcoming "Soviet Defectors: The KGB Wanted List" (Hoover Institution).